

Divine Mercy Academy

Sean T. Davis, Principal

245 Azalea Dr,
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K to 8 Building

2526 Haymaker Rd,
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Early Childhood Center

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

I wanted to thank all of the families that were patient as we began our first week of school. It was nice meeting many of the families and I have enjoyed my first week as the administrator of Divine Mercy Academy. This summer went fast as we quickly had to work out many of the details that are involved in merging two schools. I appreciate the time that both the Athletics Board and the previous PTG has spent trying to establish a foundation for a successful new year.

I realize that making a transition from North American Martyrs and Saint Bernadette School to become Divine Mercy Academy will be a new experience for everyone. Together we will work together to establish a new identity that will hopefully be one that represents a strong faith, academic excellence, and compassion for others.

I would like to thank all of the countless volunteers and teachers for helping ensure our first week was safe. It truly is nice to see so many families offering their time and talents to ensure Divine Mercy Academy is successful. I appreciate Monroeville Police for responding to my request on the first day to identify potential areas of improvements to our arrival/dismissal procedures so that we can ensure a safe commute. I cannot remember the last time that I have had so many positive phone calls from parents, about how excited their children are during the first week of school.

With all the preparation that it took to prepare the school for the first day of school, I recognize that some families may still have questions. I have attached a Q&A to this letter that hopefully will answer some questions that you may have. I hope you have a fantastic weekend and look forward to seeing the students on Tuesday.

Yours in Christ,
Sean Davis

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Q & A

Why did we change the start time and arrival window?

The last thing a new principal wants to do is change anything. My approach has always been to evaluate what has been done in the past and then make any necessary changes the second year. In the course of merging both schools, the previous year's schedules were reviewed to see how each building approached instruction.

In this review we realized that:

- Department of Education and Diocesan Standards for Instructional time was not being met.
- Adjusting the time allowed us to meet these standards for education.
- The result created opportunities for students to meet or exceed the time standards in all core subjects, and allowed students to have the necessary foreign language, physical education, art, music, computer, and even STEM activities.
- Families were not satisfied with long bus transportation times and one large school district was considering having our students ride the bus with older students. (safety)
- Changing the time allowed the school to have the same start time as the other Catholic schools in the region.

What about the arrival window?

- Students were being dropped off 30-40 minutes early with limited supervision.
- Early drop off was in conflict with a teachers' start time.
- Some families would pay for Morning Care while other students would just go to the classroom (safety issue).

Why is traffic so heavy in the morning?

- Many new families are driving their students for the first time.
- One school district decided to cut a bus which resulted in longer bus times. Parents are choosing instead to drive the students adding approximately 40 more cars to the drop off line.
- The previously established process for dropping off one at a time was slow and unable to accommodate the increase in traffic.
- The pipeline coming into the school cannot handle all of the new traffic. It appears that the modifications to the existing traffic patterns has improved this greatly.

Why has dismissal changed?

- Kindergarten students walking through parked cars is unsafe.
- School Districts were complaining that our buses were 35 minutes late and that this has been a problem over the years.
- Parents were sitting in their cars for up to 40 minutes and having to line up early.
- Serious safety concerns.
- The long dismissal time forced teachers to work longer days.
(We are now averaging about 17 minutes for dismissal)

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Why did we change the lunch times?

- Multiple lunch times are difficult to have while trying to meet all of the PA Instructional minutes.
- Previous lunch times needed to have a certified teacher supervising the students. Now all of the special teachers, the principal, and Kindergarten through Fourth Grade teachers are able to provide coverage now and in severe weather. (safety)
- The new schedule has two shifts with each grade K-4 arriving every 5-minutes. Some of the students have recess earlier in the day, some have it after lunch or the homeroom teacher can adjust if needed.
- While grades K-4 is eating, 5-8 are having a 20-minute recess.
- I currently have grades 5-8 scheduled to arrive 5 minutes apart so they are not all arriving at the same time, however the cafeteria volunteers from previous years advised that I have all the students come in at the same time because that is what they have done in the past. This change seemed to work fine.
- Teachers are now able to eat together and collaborate.
- Kids are now able to enjoy recess with other students.

Why were some teachers hired and others were not?

- The process for merging schools is clearly spelled out in the teachers' contract. The teachers are given points for length of service, certification, advanced degrees, and religious education credits. The majority of the certified teachers are all working in either the K-8 building or Early Childhood center. While we attempted to call back teachers as the enrollment was growing, some have found employment at other schools.

How will we communicate with teachers and staff?

- Previously the teachers were all using personal email, school notes, and Option C. We have purchased the domain www.ourdma.org so that we can have a new website and install Google Apps for Education that includes email. The plan is for all staff members to have the same email extension representing the school. After the email was set-up and used for about two weeks, Google noticed that North American Martyrs already had an account and shut down the ourdma.org email until they process our non-profit status. Normally we would just switch to Office 365, but we need Google logins for all of the students Chromebooks. (Yes we will be using ChromeBooks)

Is there going a fund raiser fee?

- The school is expected to raise approximately \$150,000 as part of the formula to determine tuition. The PTG that we will be establishing will determine how many fundraisers that we have and how to meet this goal. Scrip does very well in the parish and should be considered in this planning.

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Why did we switch to a tuition collection?

- Tuition collection is one of the most crucial elements to maintain financial stability of any private school. This assists in the planning of staff, materials, field trips, extra-curricular activities, and all aspects of the school.
- The FACTS tuition management systems is used in the majority of the schools and some type of system is in place at the High schools.
- Using the FACTS system assists the school in applying financial aid, and assists the Diocese and identifying families in need. The system will also show if a family has a student in another school or Catholic High School.

Why did we not have orientation like in the past?

- The yearly calendar was planned out in early summer and this information wasn't shared with me in time. By the time this information was shared there was not enough time to plan as we were still in the process of registering new families, hiring additional staff, and working with every family on setting up their FACTS account.
- We must have 180 days of instruction and the teachers have 188 days for clerical and in-service time. Two half days are allowed for parent/teacher conferences. This day would not be counted as a school day and would have been added on to the end of the year.
- We are planning a curriculum night to learn about what to expect in each grade as well as what services are available.

When will our mass times be?

- Currently we are planning for three masses a week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 9:20 a.m. I have scheduled the breakdown of (K-2), (3-5), (6-8). We will have several priests involved in the mass schedule.
- We will continue whole school masses as they have done in the past.